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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUBLIN 000013

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [UK](#) [CVIS](#) [EI](#)  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH WEAPONS DECOMMISSIONERS  
  
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Classified By: Ambassador Daniel M. Rooney. Reasons 1.4(b/d).

11. C) SUMMARY: The group charged with overseeing the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons in Ireland told us that weapons decommissioning has been accomplished to a great extent, but not completely. Completing devolution of policing and justice remains crucial to the peace process; failure to do so could vindicate the violence of dissident splinter groups in the eyes of many. Continuing separation of the two communities in Northern Ireland and lack of economic opportunity also threatens further progress. The possibility of traveling to the U.S. is a powerful "carrot" with which the U.S. can influence activists' behavior, according to our interlocutors. We will continue to strengthen Irish resolve on urging the Northern Ireland parties to agree on devolution.  
END SUMMARY.

12. (C) On January 13 Ambassador Rooney met with General John de Chastelain, the Head of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning in Northern Ireland, and co-Commissioners Andrew Sens, Brigadier Tauno Nieminen and Aaro Suonio. (STRICTLY PROTECT ALL FOUR.) De Chastelain said the Commission must start wrapping up its work, as its annual mandate expires on February 9 and will not be renewed. The major paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland have all decommissioned their weapons, with the most recent having been the loyalist Ulster Defense Association (UDA), which decommissioned its weapons on January 6. One splinter group within the UDA, the Southeast Antrim Brigade, has not decommissioned its weapons, however. DeChastelain said the Southeast Antrim Brigade had indicated a desire to decommission, possibly even before the Commission's mandate expires, but was being held back by concerns regarding dissident elements within the group.

13. (C) Sens said, while stressing the Commission's independence and commitment to "stay out of politics," that one concern of the loyalist groups is their desire to reap the same benefits from the decommissioning process as republican leaders have, including increased job opportunities and training, and the ability to travel to the U.S. He commented that when Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams received his first U.S. visa in 1994, it was a powerful message to the leaders of paramilitary groups to reform their behavior. Loyalist groups are now vocalizing their desire to have this same benefit, although they realize they might not be eligible due to previous criminal and terrorism-related activities.

14. (C) The Commissioners' assessment of the current state of play regarding the peace process was that great progress had been made and a return to widespread violence was

unlikely but not impossible. They said the most constructive role the USG and the Irish government could play would be to continue to make clear to the unionist side that devolution of policing and justice remains a necessary final step in the peace process. If that step is not taken, they said, the mainstream republicans, particularly Sinn Fein, stand to lose credibility with their base, while the message of the republican dissidents, who advocate a return to terrorist violence, would be vindicated in the eyes of many frustrated grassroots nationalists. At the same time, the Commissioners worried that Ireland and the UK are already discussing a Plan B to keep the peace process moving along if devolution fails. Both governments need to maintain resolve on devolution, they stressed.

15. (C) The Commissioners stressed that continuing sectarianism and lack of economic opportunity remain two factors that endanger continuing progress toward stability in Northern Ireland. They described the continued day-to-day separation between Catholics and Protestants, especially noticeable in separate schools, separate neighborhoods and separate sporting teams. Lack of jobs or economic opportunity for young, uneducated and untrained men on both sides of the divide are the biggest potential threat to peace, all agreed. All who are interested in consolidating the gains of recent years need to promote economic opportunity, job training and integration of the two communities, they said.

16. (C) COMMENT: The Commissioners' assessment of the current state of play, namely that a return to violence is unlikely but not impossible - and that completing devolution of policing and justice is necessary in order to avoid a complete impasse in the peace process - tracks with

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what our Irish contacts report. We will continue to strengthen Irish resolve on devolution to avoid a premature election of any Plan B. END COMMENT.

17. (C) NOTE: The Commissioners stressed the importance of their independence and impartiality; please protect their confidentiality. END NOTE.

ROONEY